

YEMEN

TRIBES, THE STATE, AND THE UNRAVELLING

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It is difficult at any time to make any sensible evaluation of the importance of tribalism and the role of tribes within the Yemeni state. But the turmoil of 2011 and the following years has meant that this is a particularly challenging moment to attempt such an exercise. Yemen's government has not been a tribal regime. Yet tribalism pervades Yemeni society as it influences and limits Yemeni politics. The 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih regime, which spanned a third of a century, depended for its core support on just two minor tribes, although it expected to rely on the tribally dominated military and security forces in general. But tribesmen in these institutions are likely to be motivated by career considerations as much as, or more, than tribal identity. Some shaykhs also serve as officers, but their control over their own tribes is often suspect.

In the post-Salih era, the regime is likely to reduce reliance on tribes for support, even as it must grapple with a lack of control over them. Many tribes oppose the government in general on grounds of autonomy and self-interest. Sarah Phillips has noted that "the relationship between the tribes and the state is ... often contradictory with each other at times increasing and at times

diminishing the other's power, but both reinforcing traits in the other that provide considerable obstacles to state building.²¹ The Republic of Yemen government can expect to face tribal resistance to its authority if it moves aggressively or inappropriately in either the north or the south. But it should be stressed that tribal attitudes do not differ fundamentally from the attitudes of other Yemenis and that tribes often seek to operate within Yemeni politics as other constituencies and political parties do. Tribalism is a strong force in Yemen, but not a monolithic one with a universal point of view.

There are two antithetical—yet simultaneously complementary—prisms that provide insights into the relationship between tribes and the state in Yemen. The first is the role of tribes *in* the state, i.e. how they cooperate with the state, contribute to the state's authority, and provide support if not legitimacy for the regime. The other is the diametric counterbalance between the two: the tribes versus the state. This chapter, after briefly introducing the phenomenon of tribalism in Yemen, focuses on each of these prisms in turn before drawing some very tentative conclusions regarding what tribalism may mean in the post-Salih era. But the first task is to provide a brief summary of the momentous changes that swept Yemen in 2011–12.

The unravelling of Yemen

Conclusions about the significance of the role played by tribes in Yemeni politics have become far murkier as a result of the events of 2011–15. The emergence of popular protests, first in Sanaa and then across the country in January and February 2011, was inspired by popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. These protests quickly exposed the fragility of the Yemeni political system and over the next year inexorably created newly emergent foci of opposition to the status quo, strengthening the position of existing opposition forces even as they weakened the social, economic, and political fabric of the state.

Prior to 2011, President 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih faced a myriad of challenges during his three decades of rule. In part, these derived from the historical difficulty of governing a topographically demanding territory populated by firmly independent-minded inhabitants, particularly in the majority of the country that still owed primary allegiance to tribes. Adding to this daunting environment was the constant pursuit of power from within the military-dominated regime and those on its fringes, including legally recognized opposition parties. Not surprisingly, Salih was given to describing his situation as “dancing on the heads of snakes.”

At the same time, however, the President faced three distinct, organized threats to his political survival—and that of the Yemeni state as it existed. In large part, these threats were his own making. Chronologically, the first was his ambivalent attitude toward the so-called “Afghan Arabs,” Yemenis who had made their way to Afghanistan in the 1980s to fight with the *mujahidin* against the Soviet invaders. Many were consequently radicalized and devoted their efforts to creating an Islamic state in Yemen upon their return. Salih seems to have regarded them as allies against other opposition he faced, even though their eventual goal was his replacement. But his strategy was double-faceted. While accepting Islamist groups as tacit allies, he also made sure that he was seen to be taking action against them to win support from the United States and Western countries for his counter-terrorism efforts.

The second threat comes from a movement originally calling itself al-Shabab al-Mu'minin (the Believing Youth) and later Ansar Allah (Companions of God), but more commonly known as the Huthis after their founder, Husayn Badr al-Din al-Huthi.²² The Huthis originally seemed to be a revivalist movement for the restoration of the position of the Zaydi subsect of Shi'ism and its role in the state, provoked in part by the success of Salafi proselytization in the northern Sa'dah province of Yemen. In 2004, the army moved against the Huthis in their stronghold of the western mountains of the province; but the offensive was both ineffective and monumentally destructive to villages and human life. The Huthis managed to hold their own and the following years saw stalemate, followed by renewed fighting and renewed cease-fires. The Yemeni army was unable to achieve any notable success, despite its extensive use of air power and artillery. The subsequent narrative is confused, but it seems that in late 2009 Yemeni armed forces secured Saudi permission to move through Saudi territory to strike at the Huthis from the rear. This provoked Huthi attacks on Saudi armed forces, and Saudi forces were able to regain control of Saudi territory by the application of superior firepower, if not efficiency.

Active fighting was suspended with the signing of a Qatari-brokered ceasefire in February 2010. Although punctuated by incidents, the uneasy ceasefire continued to hold, probably to the Huthis' advantage as they increased their funding, arsenal, and support. It is debatable whether the Huthis were cultish from the beginning, or have adopted their anti-government, anti-American, and anti-Jewish stances over the years of conflict. Much has been made of Iranian support for the Huthis, particularly by the Yemeni government. Yemen became regarded as the arena for a proxy war between Saudi Arabia

(which backed the Yemeni government) and Iran (which backed the Huthis). However, there is little evidence for substantial Iranian support and even less evidence for the contention that the Huthis have converted from Zaydi Shi'ism to the Ja'fari strain practiced in Iran.

The third major threat to the Salih regime was the intensification of disaffection in the half of Yemen that was independent South Yemen prior to 1990. The dissatisfaction with what turned out to be northern domination of the south provoked the civil war of 1994, in which the south unsuccessfully sought to secede. Although the Salih regime was able to regain administrative control over the south, popular resentment festered. By 2007, opposition was loosely organized under the banner of the Southern Movement (*al-Hirak*) and demonstrations began to occur with some frequency, long before those of 2011 elsewhere in Yemen. The goals of southern dissidents ranged between a desire for autonomy and agitation for outright independence. No coherent leadership had emerged by 2012, and this remained true in the following years.³

Yemen's political situation was always precarious. But since February 2011, the country has slid even further towards anarchy. The sources of opposition were magnified and further fragmented with the emergence of new actors. Prominent among them were the demonstrators themselves, the *shabab* (youth), who camped out at Taghyir (Change) Square in Sanaa and Hurriyah (Freedom) Square in Ta'iz, as well as in other cities around the country. After months of sustained opposition, a loose and informal leadership of these predominantly young protesters emerged. The most prominent among them was Tawakkul Karman, who eventually received the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her role. Taking their cue from the Egyptian revolution that toppled President Hosni Mubarak, the populist demonstrators demanded the ousting of President 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih and the institution of a democratic government, untainted by the existing prominent political figures and opposition parties.

Organized legal opposition had been led for years by al-Islah, a mixture of Islamists and tribal forces, and a coalition of ideological parties gathered together as the Joint Meeting Parties. The Yemeni Socialist Party, one component of the Joint Meeting Parties, and al-Islah had each served as partners in the government with Salih's General People's Congress, but both had been forced out as Salih sensed his strength without them. As the demonstrations in 2011 took hold, the Joint Meeting Parties began to change their demands to include the replacement of President Salih and the General People's Congress with its own leadership. While this was a credible approach and, indeed, proved effective when the Joint Meeting Parties provided the interim

prime minister after Salih's resignation, neither it nor al-Islah were supported by the populist movement, which tarred them as being part of the same old corrupt system.

The struggle for power grew more complicated in March 2011 when Major General 'Ali Muhsin Salih al-Ahmar, a close relative of the President and commander of the 1st Armored Division, defected from the regime. As commander of the north-west military district, 'Ali Muhsin had headed the government offensive against the Huthis, and there has been speculation that he carried out the initial attacks because of his Salafi orientation. It was also widely believed that he had hoped to succeed Salih as president and had become increasingly disillusioned as Salih seemed to be grooming his son Ahmad to succeed him. Thus, perhaps it was not surprising that 'Ali Muhsin declared his opposition to the President. Nor should it be surprising that he announced he would provide protection for the demonstrators in Taghyir Square against government forces, as this would seem intended to boost his standing amongst the populist forces in addition to his formidable military might in his quest for the presidency.

The free-for-all escalated further when Shaykh Hamid b. 'Abdullah b. Husayn al-Ahmar joined his brothers, including Sadiq, the head of the Hashid tribal confederation, in demanding that President Salih step down. While 'Ali Muhsin's move to the opposition threatened the President's military support, the actions by the Ahmar brothers threatened the President's tribal base. Hamid al-Ahmar's presidential ambitions had been common knowledge for some time and his influence within the Joint Meeting Parties was seen as one means to that end. His tacit alliance with 'Ali Muhsin seemed to be part of a collective effort to oust Salih, their common rival, from the presidential palace. Salih was wounded and some of his top officials were wounded or killed by an explosion in the palace on 3 June 2011, and the regime was quick to blame Hamid al-Ahmar and 'Ali Muhsin for the attack.

At the same time, southern dissidence increased, emboldened by events in other Arab countries and the example of protesters in Sanaa and Ta'iz. But the situation was confused by a simultaneous increase in activity by Islamist fundamentalists under the banner of Ansar al-Shari'a, a movement allied to, if not actually controlled by, al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The Ansar occupied various southern towns, exercised considerable power in Aden, and even briefly occupied Rada', a significant town between Sanaa and Ta'iz. Salih's opponents charged that he had pulled security forces back, deliberately allowing Ansar al-Shari'a to expand its base of operations in order to demonstrate that continued unrest led to chaos that only he could control.

While a new “national unity” government was created in December 2011, with Joint Meeting Parties politician Muhammad Salim Basindawah as Prime Minister, Salih continued to prevaricate about resigning, thus infuriating his opposition in Yemen, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the West. Presumably, increasingly strong external pressure was the deciding factor in forcing him to resign in February 2012. His weak vice president, ‘Abd Rabuh Mansur Hadi, was overwhelmingly elected in a single-candidate poll to serve as interim president for two years. Nevertheless, Salih continued to reside in Yemen and retained leadership of the General People’s Congress. Many of his close relatives—including sons, nephews, and cousins—remained in their positions in the military, adding an additional layer of complication to Yemen’s descent into chaos.

The following years after Salih’s resignation saw Yemen seeming to accelerate in a downward spiral, politically as well as economically. The weakness of Hadi, whose interim position was extended, further threatened the foundations of the regime and none of the elements described above were able to seize power or even strongly influence events. The fragile situation exploded into even more obvious fragmentation in the summer of 2014. The Huthis had continued to demand the removal of corrupt politicians in Sanaa, and their ranks swelled with other tribesmen opposed to the existing national and tribal order. Thus bolstered, the Huthis began to advance territorially, and by September 2014 they were in control of Sanaa. Their rapid and unexpected progress was said to have been aided by the support of ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Salih and the decision by army commanders to refrain from employing their troops to stop the Huthis. Shortly afterward, the Huthis moved into towns south of Sanaa and captured the major Red Sea port of al-Hudaydah.

Frustrated by the continuing stalemate in national politics, the Huthis increased their pressure on the regime to arrange for the creation of a new system of government and to scrap the proposed division of Yemen into six federal regions. In January 2015, Huthi fighters effectively placed President Hadi and his new Prime Minister, Khalid Bahah, under house arrest. The President, Prime Minister, and cabinet promptly announced their resignation rather than make changes under Huthi pressure and force. The consequence of these developments was the further deterioration of the Yemeni state. AQAP mounted attacks on Huthi positions and assassinations of Huthi figures, with the result that a virtual open state of war broke out between the two groups. The position of al-Hirak and other southerners hardened into resolve for independence. The Gulf Cooperation Council countries, which had

unsuccessfully mediated in the past, decried what they termed a Huthi coup. One of the consequences of the Huthi rise to prominence and control seemed to be a recrudescence of tribal power and direction, both in the reinvigoration of Zaydi tribal solidarity in the north and in the defensive reaction of Sunni eastern and southern tribes against the militantly Zaydi Huthis, and therefore in support of AQAP.

The tribal nature of Yemen

Yemen, perhaps more than any other state in the Arab world, is fundamentally a tribal society and nation.⁴ To a very large degree, social standing in Yemen is defined by tribal membership. Tribal affiliation is the norm of society. Other Yemenis either hold a roughly equal status to the tribespeople, for example, the *sayyid* families (pl. *sada*), the *qadi* families, and the urban population; or they hold an inferior status, such as the *muzayyin* and the *akhdam*.⁵ The tribes in Yemen hold far greater importance vis-à-vis the state than elsewhere and continue to challenge the state on various levels. At the same time, a broad swath of central Yemen below the Zaydi-Shafi‘i divide—including the highlands north and south of Ta‘iz and in the Tihamah coastal plain—consists of a more peasantized society where tribal ties and reliance are muted. Nevertheless, the “detrribalized” peasantry still possesses some tribal identity.

The emphasis on tribes in Yemen is socially and politically important because it forms the fundamental reference point for a great majority of Yemenis. Tribalism (*qabaliyyah*) not only assures membership in a collective unit, but defines the tribesperson in relation to the world and provides protection and assistance whenever necessary. The family, the clan, the tribe, and the confederation all comprise stages in the definition of the individual and the delineation of the political landscape. While tribes putatively consist of common descent groups, the genealogy is far less important than the existence and workings of the interlaced web. This defines not only membership and status but also territory, since much of the country is finely detailed into a complex tribal geography. In tribal terms, their territory has always been the same. Therefore, tribal identity is also territorial identity.⁶

The tribesperson enjoys rights and benefits from tribal membership but also bears responsibilities, among them answering “summons” when the position or territory of the tribe is threatened. The fluidity of tribalism should also be kept in mind. While territorial lines have been fixed for centuries, the alliances between tribes and between components of tribes may change with great

rapidity. Much depends on the situation, the proximity of a particular tribe to the crisis situation, and on the leadership of the tribal unit. Tribal units who respond in one way to a particular situation may well respond in a different or even diametrically opposite way in a subsequent similar situation. Paul Dresch notes, "There is no convention of solidarity, however, no permanent coercive structure, and no standing authority coincident with a section or tribe; so the relation is problematic between the sets of men defined by shared 'ancestors' and the groups of men who actually form on a given occasion."⁷

It is tempting to regard shaykhs of tribes as wielders of considerable power. This may be true in some cases, due to either the strength of personality of the individual shaykh or the dominant position of the shaykhly family, or both. Yet it is far more common that shaykhs are less potentates or even chairmen than they are simply notable figures who have been entrusted with certain authorities on specific occasions and in limited ways.

The tribe in Yemen retains much of its essential social and cultural role. The tribe is a corporate unit. In the absence of strong central authority, an adequate national economy, and countrywide socialization of Yemenis as citizenry, tribal identification and allegiance remain paramount for tribal members. The tribe provides protection for its members and requires the assistance of its members for the tribe's protection. The tribe, especially through its shaykh, may provide something of a welfare system for members in need. Tribes have traditionally organized their own affairs, both individually and collectively, with minimal interference from the state. While the *shari'a* and secular authority have played varying roles in shaping behavior, Sheila Carapico rightly observes that the combination of *qabaliyyah* (tribalism, i.e. a code of ethical behavior) and *'urf* (common or tribal law) have traditionally "provided both ethical codes and mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of disputes" between and among small groups in Yemeni society.⁸ Many Yemenis continue to prefer tribal justice and shaykhly mediation to the inefficient and often corrupt formal judicial system.

The tribe has also served as an economic unit. It has been estimated that at the beginning of the nineteenth century about three-quarters of Yemenis were tribal and engaged in cereal- and livestock-based agriculture. Households were not self-sufficient but banded together in tribal communities to organize and share common use of water supplies and irrigation, harvesting requirements, and grazing lands, as well as disaster relief and providing labor for local "public works." Even where the population has been "detrribalized" into peasantry, it acts collectively to meet emergencies, and sometimes groups maintain common property.⁹

In more recent times, individual tribes have created more extensive common self-help schemes: the *ta'awun* or cooperative (more frequently called a local development association). Increased expectations, low government capability to provide assistance, and the remittances sent or brought back by tribespeople who went to work in Saudi Arabia and farther afield spurred the widespread adoption of local development associations throughout northern Yemen in the 1970s. Typically these cooperatives built schools, roads, drinking-water systems, and other locally required improvements. Government assistance was minimal, consisting for example of arranging for a foreign development agency to loan a bulldozer for a road mainly built by local labor.

Many of these economic activities were supervised by the tribal shaykh, who also served as the focal point of interaction with other tribes and vis-à-vis the government. For the most part, shaykhs emerge from established shaykhly families, although this is not a requirement. Within the family, there is no hard and fast rule of succession, which largely depends on personal qualities. But the position of shaykh generally carries little or no authority over tribespeople. It often denotes less a rank than a function: the shaykh is the one who carries out the wishes of the tribe, solves internal disputes, and speaks for the tribe in dealings with other tribes or the outside world.¹⁰

There are some exceptions, which are generally the paramount shaykhs (*shaykh al-mashayikh*) who often wield great influence within their tribes and confederations and whose power is enhanced by their wealth and ownership of land in areas outside tribal territory. Their position and status has been augmented by their incorporation into the state system and resultant opportunities to acquire more wealth and influence. Prominent examples include the paramount shaykhs of the al-Ahmar clan of the Hashid confederation, the Abu Ra's clan of the Dhu Muhammad tribe, and the al-Shayif of the Dhu Husayn. Nevertheless, the few great shaykhs are exceptional. The influence of such men can rise and fall without changes in the tribes' formal structure and without major changes in group alignments, while their own position is made more difficult by the fact that in all but the smallest unit there are numerous shaykhs, not arranged in a hierarchy or even in order of precedence. Indeed, the number of shaykhly families is indeterminately large.¹¹

Traditionally there were four main and permanent tribal confederations in the northern half of Yemen. The most important of these are the Hashid and the Bakil. The third, the Madhhaj, lost importance in the twentieth century (in part because elements of it were absorbed by the Bakil); and the fourth confederation, the Zaraniq, has disintegrated. Technically, Hashid and Bakil

are both tribes deriving from the Hamdan, Yemen's pre-eminent tribe of the medieval period. Both occupy much of northern Yemen to the north and east of Sanaa, and both are made up of a large number of subsidiary tribes. Their total population has been estimated at more than 500,000.¹² The Hashid confederation includes the al-'Usaymat, 'Idhar, Bani Suraym, Kharif, Hamdan San'a', Sanhan, and Bilad al-Rus subsections. The Bakil confederation includes the Khawlan, Sa'dah, and Al 'Ammar, some of the tribes of a sub-confederation called Dahm, including Al Salim, Al 'Amalisah, Dhu Muhammad, Dhu Husayn, and Bani Nawf, as well as the Wa'ilah, Sufyan, Arhab, Murhibaj, Nihm, 'Iyal Yazid, 'Iyal Surayh, Bani Hushaysh, and Khawlan al-Tiyal. The Madhhaj includes the Murad, 'Ans, al-Hada, and Qayfa.

Part of the reason for the ascendancy of the Hashid has been the long-time effective leadership provided by the al-Ahmar clan of the Humran section of the al-'Usaymat tribe. Nasir al-Ahmar served as paramount shaykh in the early twentieth century. His son Husayn succeeded him and remained head of the tribe and of the confederation until his execution at the hands of Imam Ahmad in 1960. Husayn's son 'Abdullah then took up the position, which he exploited as his power base to play a significant role on the national scene until his death at the end of 2007. Shaykh 'Abdullah al-Ahmar was a prominent figure in the republican cause during the 1960s civil war in North Yemen, and subsequently served as speaker of the legislature and a founder of the al-Islah party. It could be said that he was the only individual to emerge in the 1960s who exercised significant influence on the national level over the course of almost five decades. It can also be inferred that one reason the Hashid tribes—particularly the al-'Usaymat, Kharif, and Bani Suraym—remained such a cohesive unit was the steady leadership of Shaykh 'Abdullah.

The other large confederation, the Bakil, has not enjoyed the same cohesion, and the authority of its shaykhs has paled in comparison with those of the al-Ahmar clan. It was noted in the 1980s that the paramount shaykh of the Bakil at that time, Naji b. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Shayif (from the Dhu Husayn tribe), was unable to command much influence over his own tribe, let alone the allied ones, and consequently 'Abdullah al-Ahmar possessed the ability to summon the Bakil tribes to war.¹³ Nevertheless, the Abu Luhum family of the Nihm tribe of Bakil has been prominent on the national scene since the 1962 revolution, as described below.

As in most other countries of the Middle East, the cohesion and influence of tribes has weakened in Yemen over the last few decades—although perhaps not to as great an extent as elsewhere, in part because of the weakness of the

government. There are a number of reasons behind this. Amongst the northern tribes, the effect of decades of labor migration to Saudi Arabia has upset the traditional pecking order, as tribespeople come back with their savings and have been less inclined to follow established shaykhs. At the same time, many shaykhly families have taken up residence in the towns, loosening their ties to the tribes and thus their influence. This has made a potential opening for the government to interfere in what used to be regarded as tribal matters.

While tribes are the norm in Yemeni society and the shaykhs animate and sometimes guide the tribes, it is also important to highlight the importance of families from two other sectors of Yemeni society, the *sayyid* and *qadi* families. The *sayyid* families are traditionally believed to be the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Historically they played a key role in Yemeni politics, particularly in the north. The Zaydi imams, who provided the traditional religious and political leadership of much of Yemen for a thousand years, had to be of *sayyid* descent, and they generally appointed members of other *sayyid* families as their lieutenants and provincial governors. More generally, *sayyids* served as neutral arbiters between tribes and as religious scholars. However, the revolution of 1962 and the demise of the royalist cause during the ensuing civil war severely impacted the status and role of the *sayyids*. In the south, the *sayyid* families saw their position imperiled by independence and many fled the country. Their subsequent role in Yemeni politics has largely been one of opposition to the Sanaa government.

Similarly, the *qadi* families have played significant historical roles in northern Yemen. Unlike the *sayyids* who form a hereditary caste, anyone can become a *qadi* through personal merit and religious studies. More often, however, *qadi* status is passed down through particular families. Furthermore, the *qadi* families did not suffer the fate of many *sayyids* after the revolution, in part because they had tended to oppose the Hamid al-Din imams well before 1962. Perhaps the most prominent *qadi* family is that of al-Iryani. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani served as President of the Yemen Arab Republic from 1967 until 1974, and his cousin 'Abd al-Karim was the long-time prime minister during much of President 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih's tenure. The widespread al-'Ansi family has also provided government officials and ministers, both during the time of the imams and in the Yemen Arab Republic and Republic of Yemen governments. Because they have been unable to protect their *qadi* status adequately, the family has made an arrangement with the Ahmad b. Kul faction of the Dhu Muhammad tribe, which has effectively made them tribespeople.¹⁴ (Al-'Ansi should not be confused with al-Anisi, the patronym of those from the prominent tribe of al-Anis.)

Tribe versus state in Yemen: the background

Tribes and states have co-existed uneasily in Yemen for innumerable centuries. Tribes played contentious roles vis-à-vis four states in Yemen over the past century, resisting the expansion of state control over their domain and, seemingly paradoxically, being instrumental in the overthrow or support of recent state systems.

The Hashid and Bakil tribes were known as the “wings of the imamate” in pre-1962 North Yemen. Without a standing army until the 1950s, imams were forced to call upon tribal levies to defend the region, defeat rivals, and impose order. To ensure compliance from the tribes, the imams kept sons of shaykhs hostage in Sanaa, where they received their education. When Imam Yahya was assassinated in 1948, his son Ahmad was forced to travel throughout the northern countryside to rally the tribes behind him. As a result he was able to regain control of Sanaa, but the price paid was giving the tribes leave to sack the capital. This was one reason why Imam Ahmad chose to reside in Ta'iz, and why Sanaa backed the republicans during the 1960s civil war.

Tribes were also important in the south. Britain occupied the port of Aden in 1839 and declared it a crown colony in 1932. To protect Aden, Britain gradually forged treaties of protection with petty rulers and shaykhs in the hinterland. The resultant Aden Protectorate was a patchwork system of indigenous control and British supervision. While some areas, particularly in the Western Aden Protectorate, easily accepted protected status, less control was exercised over the east. In addition, the area of the Radfan Mountains, north of Aden and abutting North Yemen, was continually challenging British authority. The Royal Air Force was entrusted with responsibility for security in Aden and the Protectorate and employed air power to keep what were regarded as recalcitrant tribes and rulers in line. Thus action was taken between 1919 and 1949 against the Subayhi tribe, the Mansuri (a section of Subayhi), and the Qutaybi on at least five occasions each.¹⁵

Again, tribes in the north and south were instrumental in the replacement of the respective regimes. The failed attempt in September 1962 to assassinate the new imam, Muhammad al-Badr, provoked a long civil war in the north between republicans (the Egyptian-backed revolutionaries) and royalists (the defenders of the Imamate). Despite the direct involvement of Egyptian troops in support of the republicans and the strong indirect support of Saudi Arabia for the royalists, the ebb and flow of the war on the battlefields depended heavily on the shifting allegiances of the tribes. Hashid's support for the Republic was the consequence of Imam Ahmad's dispute with the al-Ahmar clan. Shaykh

Nasir b. Mabkhut al-Ahmar, the paramount shaykh of the Hashid confederation, was significant in the election of Yahya Hamid al-Din as imam in the early twentieth century. But Shaykh Nasir's son Husayn, who had succeeded him as paramount shaykh, ran foul of Imam Ahmad in 1960. In anger, the Imam ordered the execution of Shaykh Husayn and his son, even though they were under his protection. As a consequence, the Bayt al-Ahmar and the Hashid supported the republicans against Ahmad's son, Muhammad al-Badr.

The Bakil also tended to side with the republicans. The execution by Imam Ahmad of a number of the Abu Ra's, the shaykhly family of the Dhu Muhammad tribe, resulted in their support for the republicans for the same reasons as the al-Ahmar. Another prominent Bakil shaykh, Sinan Abu Luhum of the Nihm tribe, had fled to Aden to escape Imam Ahmad and returned north to support the republicans during the civil war. The opposition of these shaykhs to the Imamate cost them considerable standing within their tribes.

In the south, many of the shaykhs and sultans who had enjoyed treaty relations with the British joined in the attempts to create the South Arabian Federation, or joined the conservative South Arabian League seeking British withdrawal.¹⁶ As the struggle against the British intensified during the mid-1960s, they were increasingly relegated to the sidelines. Those who did not flee in the 1966–7 period were killed by the National Liberation Front and by the Front for the Liberation of Occupied Southern Yemen. Many retired to comfortable lives in Jiddah, and only a few continued to intrigue against the new government of the south in Aden.

Strenuous efforts were made to characterize the resistance to the new People's Republic of Southern Yemen (renamed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1970) as a broad anti-Communist front. But the very nature of the resistance movement mitigated against tribal solidarity. Nationality was promoted as the common identifier, not tribalism. Those tribes that did oppose the southern Yemen government en masse tended to be the nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes from the perimeter of the Rub' al-Khali (the empty quarter). They included elements of al-Sa'ar, al-Manahil, and al-Mahrah, many of whose members moved to the Gulf. The anti-government movement survived largely because of Saudi support and donations and recruitment from tribespeople working in the Gulf. While a few significant tribal raids were made in the first few years after Aden's independence, they gradually faded into insignificance. Tribal support for the secessionist Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1994 was of only marginal importance.

Officially, and in many ways practically, the new regime in Aden was anti-tribal. Tribes, along with religion and feudalism, were viewed as part of the old

order that had been eliminated. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that a high proportion of the National Liberation Front's leadership, the ranks of the officer corps, and civil servants were tribespeople. As the National Liberation Front's solidarity dissolved into internecine struggles, tribal members rallied to the defense (or the avenging) of fellow tribe members in leading positions. The 'Awaliq (individual: 'Awlaqi), who had been heavily recruited for the army and the police, were caught in the middle of this. Many senior officers and policemen were 'Awlaqis but were purged in the early days of independence. Still, the preponderance of 'Awlaqis in the ranks of the army and police continued for years.

Although tribalism had little to do with the circumstances that produced the 1994 civil war, it did play diametrically opposing roles on the two sides. The energy of tribalism in the south seems to have been sapped during the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen period. Although the ex-southern army included many tribespeople in its ranks, tribes as such played little role in the actual fighting. The tribes in the line of fire, notably the 'Awaliq, Yafi', and the tribes of Radfan, simply exercised prudence and stayed out of the fighting. Efforts to engage the tribes of the Hadramawt and east just fizzled.

Northern tribes, however, were recruited by the Sanaa government to provide assistance. While tribes as collective units took part in the fighting, a large number of tribespeople, using their own rifles and vehicles, turned out along the battle front and poured into the south. The north's victory provided northern tribes with an age-old tribal privilege: looting. In addition, the tribes seem to have collaborated with Islamists and "Afghan Arabs" in the destruction of property in the south, including the brewery and the domestic trading corporation. However, it is unlikely that tribespeople who were not also Islamists participated in the widespread destruction of mosques and tombs. Bakil tribes, presumably desirous of acting against Sanaa and loosely allied with the Yemeni Socialist Party (descended from the National Liberation Front), stayed out of the fray, as did those of the Madhhaj confederation.¹⁷

Tribes in the Republic of Yemen state

The government of the Republic of Yemen faces a paradoxical dilemma. On the one hand, it wishes to extend central authority throughout the country through such measures as assuming responsibility for law and order, the provision of social services, and enhancement of tax collection. On the other hand, much of Yemen is a very tribal society with a strong history of self-reliance and

autonomy. Any government presence is problematic in certain areas of the country—either because of formidable tribal resistance to outside interference (particularly in the north and west) or because of resentment over government policy—especially in the south as a result of the 1994 civil war and economic dissatisfaction. Therefore considerable swathes of the country maintain strong resistance to government penetration. This is nothing new. The imams confronted considerable and stubborn resistance to their control, as did the Ottomans, the British, and the Egyptians. Phillips notes that under 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih's rule, in particular, the shaykhs were said to "exist in a circular relationship with the state, negotiating with it on behalf of their tribes, extracting benefits, and thereby representing the state in their local regions. There has been a marked tradeoff between the wealth of the political relevant sheikhs and the cohesion of their tribes."¹⁸

In dealing with tribes, the government has various policy options. It can actively work to reduce tribal independence by force (reducing autonomy or crushing resistance), by blandishment (providing direct financial or development assistance), or by encouragement (extolling the benefits of closer integration into a national community). Alternatively, the narrowly based regime could choose to rely on the tribes for tangible support against a skeptical and growing urban population, southern discontent, and/or al-Qa'ida and like-minded religio-politically-based opposition.

In truth, the Salih regime chose elements of both strategies. The state's growing reach reduced tribal freedom of action in many areas. Government presence and supervision was strengthened throughout southern Yemen to pacify the region. At the same time, the general weakness of the state, especially its economic weakness, required that it co-opt shaykhs by incorporating them into the system as participants and by relying on them to secure the cooperation of their tribe members. It has been asserted that some 4,500 shaykhs received monthly salaries from the government during Salih's reign as a means of controlling them.¹⁹ The regime also had a history of relying upon individual and corporate units of tribespeople to back up the armed forces. This was clear in the 1994 war, and the strategy resurfaced in the fighting against the Huthis in the far north. Furthermore, the Salih regime deliberately sought to encourage the re-emergence of tribal leaders and tribal solidarity in the south as a component of its efforts to weaken southern opposition.

While the fall of the Salih regime has transformed and diminished the state's extreme dependence or reliance on tribes, it has not eliminated their central political role. It is obvious that former President Salih has a tribal

background. It is also obvious that he created an inner web of support from members of his family, his clan, and his fellow Sanhan tribe. Furthermore, he co-opted some prominent Hashid figures, as well as the Hamdan San'a' tribe.

But it should not be assumed from this that Salih's rule was tribally based. The idea that the regime was a condominium of Zaydi and Hashidi interests is misleading. While tribes as a whole and certain tribes, or sections of tribes, had some affinity with the Salih regime, they were just as likely to jostle for advantage within a larger set of political actors and chafe at or resent the policies of the government, and particularly those of the regime. In part, this set of circumstances derives from both socio-economic changes in the country over the past several decades and the urbanization, nationalization, and globalization of major shaykhs. Many of these now live in Sanaa, some have positions in the government or military, and most are engaged in commerce.

'Ali 'Abdullah Salih's authority rested most fundamentally on three concentric rings of support.²⁰ The first was that of immediate relatives. His brother, Muhammad 'Abdullah Salih, was appointed head of the Central Security Organization, followed by his nephew, Yahya Muhammad 'Abdullah Salih. His half-brother 'Ali Salih was appointed head of the Republican Guard. Most importantly, he promoted his son Ahmad, who most Yemenis believe was being groomed to replace his father in the manner that Bashar al-Asad replaced his father, Hafiz. The President's inner circle also included his eldest daughter, Bilqis, who enjoyed considerable influence despite not having any significant position, and his son-in-law, Muhammad Duwayd, head of the presidential palace. The web was commercial as well as political: the President assumed a partnership role in Hayl Sa'id Enterprises, Yemen's largest company; his nephew Tawfiq took over the tobacco and matches company; his maternal cousin, 'Abdullah al-Qadi, began running the pharmaceutical monopoly; and his son-in-law, 'Abd al-Khaliq al-Qadi, headed the national airline.

The second circle consisted of members of the President's clan, the al-Ahmar. Perhaps the most prominent member of the broader clan was 'Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar. The third circle involved two tribes, the President's own tribe, the Sanhan, and an allied Hashid tribe, the Hamdan San'a'. Members of these two tribes occupied key positions throughout the civil government and the military/security apparatus. A good number have married into the President's family. The President's tendency to rely on fellow Sanhan tribe members was obvious. The connection of Hamdan San'a' with the regime derives from it being the tribe of President Ahmad al-Ghashmi, who succeeded—and may have ordered the killing of—President Ibrahim al-Hamdi.

During Ghashmi's brief presidency (1977–8), 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih served as his right-hand man and, in the eyes of many Yemenis, was the actual assassin of the two al-Hamdi brothers.

Before and after the assassinations, the two worked hand in hand, employing members of their two tribes to diminish the influence of al-Hamdi and his fellow, relatively reformist, officer colleagues in the Revolutionary Command Council—as well as to consolidate their own positions by enlisting and promoting Sanhan and Hamdan tribespeople in the officer ranks of the military. Although the two tribes historically were small and unimportant, their rise to ascendancy at this time was probably helped as well by their proximity to Sanaa and therefore their ability to defend the capital against internal threats. Yemenis in general, and tribe members in particular, have been more apt to characterize this method of rule as *mahsubiyyah* (patronage) than as *qabaliyyah* (tribalism).²¹

Rather than being a tribally based system of rule, the Yemeni regime seemed to resemble the structure of Saddam Hussein's Iraq in terms of concentric circles of trust and support from immediate family, clan, and tribe. Because tribes were a more powerful component of politics in Yemen than they were in Iraq, Salih was far more careful regarding the impact of his policies and actions on tribes than Saddam needed to be. At the same time, it can be noted that with the deterioration of his control over events in the 1990s, Saddam took increasing steps to bring tribes—or at least tribal shaykhs—into the system. Salih relied upon tribes for armed manpower at times and major shaykhs were co-opted into the system through payments, government and officer positions, seats in parliament, and commercial opportunities. But Salih did not exert the same level of control across the state that Saddam did. The tribes of Yemen were not integrated into the political system under Salih's control. Instead, they constituted one sector of players or constituencies in the grand game of Yemeni politics. Salih did not control them: he dealt with them, he prodded them, and he contested them.²²

A striking effect of changes to tribe-state relations that occurred during the 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih period was the shifting of many major shaykhs away from their traditional role as heads or chairmen of their own and allied tribes and as the spokesmen for their tribes in their dealings with other tribes or the state. Increasingly their interests are geared toward business, while political concerns have often been to secure and defend a seat in parliament, frequently as a member of the General People's Congress.

One of the early prompts for this transformation was the emergence of so-called "youth shaykhs." They, along with fellow tribesmen, had gone abroad

to work and returned with wealth and new-found standing amongst those who had had their horizons broadened. Many of these used the local development associations. Indeed, 'Abdullah al-Ahmar and Mujahid Abu Shawarib together founded the Hashid cooperative. Even Ibrahim al-Hamdi saw involvement with and promotion of local development associations as a route to advancement. Another alternative for the ambitions of "youth shaykhs" was a career as an army officer. Mujahid Abu Shawarib provides a good example, as do a number of the Abu Luhum from the Bakil.

Because Salih did not enjoy the support of another level of allied tribes—even amongst the Hashid—he cultivated allied shaykhs. One aspect of this approach was what Phillips characterizes as "the region's co-optive relationships with the tribal sheikhs as mediators between state power and social forces."²³ The most important of these was Shaykh 'Abdullah Husayn al-Ahmar, undoubtedly the most prominent example of the transformation mentioned above. 'Abdullah played various roles on the national scene after the civil war of the 1960s.²⁴ His original power base was as the paramount shaykh of the Hashid, which served him well during the war in the 1960s and the early years of the reconciled Yemen Arab Republic. But eventually he was transformed into a Sanaa politician. To be sure, he still was highly influential among the Hashid, he was the leading tribal shaykh in the country, and one of the most important arbiters or mediators in tribal affairs, large and small.

But, more importantly, he and his sons took up residence in Sanaa and they became involved in lucrative commercial enterprises. He struck an early alliance with 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih, which won him the position of speaker of parliament, and he served as the regime's point man in relations with Saudi Arabia. Supporters in Saudi Arabia encouraged and perhaps assisted him in the founding of the Yemeni Reform Grouping or al-Islah (discussed below). The al-Islah party was used at first to bolster Salih against the Yemeni Socialist Party of the south, becoming a junior partner in an alliance with Salih's General People's Congress. When Salih determined that he could do without the alliance, al-Islah was jettisoned into the opposition. This did not indicate a break between Salih and 'Abdullah, however, although there may have been friction. The shaykh was instrumental in rallying the northern tribes behind the regime during the 1994 civil war, and he remained an important liaison between the Saudis and Salih, with whom Riyadh had frosty relations, a major reason why Saudi Arabia quietly supported the south in the 1994 war. While his death left a vacuum in national affairs and in effective leadership of the al-'Usaymat as well as the Hashid, his changing role and status as part of the

Sanaa scene most likely mean that his son Sadiq is not able to replace him as a paramount shaykh in the same way.

Other shaykhs were co-opted into the Sanaa web, both in politics and in commerce. Some served as ministers in various governments. Mujahid Abu Shawarib of the Kharif tribe, a relative (and rival) of 'Abdullah Husayn al-Ahmar, rose from a minor tribal position answering to Shaykh 'Abdullah to a prominent military career and head of the Yemeni Ba'th Party. Although Mujahid had some support from the Hashid for the presidency following the 1978 assassination of Ahmad al-Ghashmi, he failed in his quest and had to settle for the relatively empty title of deputy prime minister and later personal adviser to the President. While a tribal shaykh, Mujahid's prominence and standing derived as much, if not more, from his military career and participation in the 1974 coup that put the Command Council in charge, with Ibrahim al-Hamdi at its head.

Another larger-than-life figure from the time of the 1960s civil war was Sinan b. 'Abdullah Abu Luhum, shaykh of the Nihm tribe and sometime paramount shaykh of the Bakil confederation. Intriguer against Imam Ahmad, republican defender and even briefly a member of the presidential council and a minister in the new Yemen Arab Republic, Sinan opposed the Republic's first President, 'Abdullah al-Sallal, and supported the "third force" that led to the Iryani government. His reward was the long-term governorship of al-Hudaydah, which he ran as a virtual fiefdom. Sinan was regarded as a maker and breaker of governments. Although decidedly conservative, his daughter was married to frequent prime minister Muhsin al-'Ayni, a self-described Ba'thist, and Sinan often supported his son-in-law in the government. Yet his leadership of the Bakil was compromised by his support for the Republic in the 1960s while much of the confederation remained royalist. Two brothers, Dirham and 'Ali, both army officers and cousins of Sinan, became members of the Command Council in 1974, although they were soon purged. Indeed, a number of tribe members of the Abu Luhum clan pursued military careers, including two of Sinan's brothers. But from the beginning of the Salih presidency, the family seemed to fade into the background. Another family member, Muhammad 'Ali Abu Luhum, took an active part in the creation of the United Bakil Council in the early 1990s.

Firm leadership of the Bakil has long been a problem. The al-Shayif family have provided the shaykhs of the Dhu Husayn tribe for generations, and several shaykhs in the last century or two have died opposing the Ottomans and the imams. Shaykh Naji b. 'Abd al-'Aziz was elected paramount shaykh of the

Bakil around 1981, but he was soon suborned by 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih into leading a quiet life in Sanaa. Another al-Shayif, Muhammad, subsequently claimed leadership of the confederation.

The Abu Ra's family of the Dhu Muhammad tribe have been equally prominent in Bakil and national contexts. Shaykh Amin rallied the Bakil to the republican cause in the 1950s, and then was an influential figure in the "third force" that helped engineer the Iryani government. He served as a minister of state until his death in 1978. His son Sadiq used his work with the local development associations as a stepping stone to ministerial portfolios of agriculture, civil service, and local administration, but never figured highly in the national political scene or amongst the Bakil.

The most important of all these shaykhs, 'Abdullah b. Husayn al-Ahmar, died on 29 December 2007. 'Abdullah's death prompts several key questions. First, can Shaykh 'Abdullah's position and influence in national politics be replicated by someone else, such as one of his sons? Four of 'Abdullah's sons have held parliamentary positions (two with the General People's Congress and two with the al-Islah party) and are well-known and powerful in Sanaa. In Yemen, as elsewhere in the Middle East, it is not uncommon for sons to take up their father's mantle.

One of 'Abdullah's sons, Hamid, has been prominent in the al-Islah and Joint Meeting Parties. In recent years, he has become increasingly critical of the President and the General People's Congress. In June 2006, he predicted that a peaceful popular revolution would overthrow the military-family alliance dominating the regime, as well as the businessmen who supported the system, and weapons dealers and smugglers. In that context, he proposed postponing presidential elections for two years and forming an interim government to carry out constitutional reforms and bring the Joint Meeting Parties into a coalition government. Hamid supported Faysal b. Shamlan and the Joint Meeting Parties in the 2006 presidential election, and later promoted al-Islah from within the Joint Meeting Parties. This included calling on the President to resign in 2009.²⁵ Shortly after the outbreak of mass demonstrations in 2011, Hamid voiced his opposition to the President and called upon him to resign. The bad blood between the two men escalated into the fighting around the house of Hamid's brother Sadiq, in the al-Hasabah neighborhood of Sanaa in late May 2011. Not long afterwards (3 June), an explosion in the presidential palace severely wounded Salih. The regime blamed it on Hamid and General 'Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar.

Husayn b. 'Abdullah al-Ahmar is a former member of parliament from the General People's Congress, who hinted at creating an alternative party in 2005

when he was not elected to the general secretariat of his party. This idea evolved into the National Solidarity Council, created in 2007, dominated by Hashid shaykhs, businessmen, and academics, and chaired by Husayn b. 'Abdullah al-Ahmar. As a party not fully developed, the National Solidarity Council claimed it would utilize the organs of civil society to bring about development that the regime is unwilling or unable to do.

'Abdullah's eldest son, Sadiq, was elected paramount shaykh of the Hashid confederation upon his father's death, but has stayed away from state institutions. He was, however, critical of President Salih and supported his ousting. 'Abdullah's other sons have also been members of parliament: Himyar al-Ahmar, who has served as deputy speaker of parliament, belongs to the General People's Congress; and Madhhaj al-Ahmar belongs to al-Islah.

While Shaykh 'Abdullah al-Ahmar has many sons who fill prominent roles on the national scene, it would be difficult for anyone to fill his shoes. He was truly *sui generis*, one of a kind. 'Abdullah arose to prominence when the tribes were paramount and victory in the 1960s civil war depended on which way the tribal winds were blowing. Now the tribes form just one of a number of constituencies in Yemeni national politics. Furthermore, 'Abdullah made his reputation during critical and unique periods in Yemen's evolution: the early years of the reconciled Yemen Arab Republic, the Hamdi period of consolidation, and the 1994 civil war. Such opportune circumstances for another self-made individual may never reappear.

His sons may have the ambitions but not the opportunities to reach his level of prominence. It is unlikely that the al-Ahmar clan will continue to exert as strong an influence in Yemeni politics as they did before 'Abdullah's death. 'Abdullah's sons do not possess their father's leadership qualities. Well before the events of 2011, for example, several of them were involved in shoot-outs with security personnel in Sanaa. Moreover, future leaders of Yemen, it seems, will have less of a need for a figure of 'Abdullah's unique status. Finally, the role of tribal blocs in underpinning the government in Yemen has decreased in importance.

It could be argued that Yemeni circumstances remain fluid enough for someone else to rise to prominence. Is there any other figure with a shaykhly background who can rally the tribes, either in support of or in opposition to the regime? Mujahid Abu Shawarib, 'Abdullah al-Ahmar's fellow Hashid tribesman and brother-in-law, would have dearly liked to supplant 'Abdullah, and even Salih, but never succeeded; and, in addition, he had the misfortune to pass from the scene before 'Abdullah. His son Jibrán, although now head

of the Kharij, does not have the standing of his father. ‘Abd al-Majid al-Zindani undoubtedly would like to exert the same level of influence, but his faction of al-Islah (the radical Islamist wing) has never controlled the party; also, although a member of one of the Bakil tribes, al-Zindani does not have a natural standing with the tribes. No one can command a pan-tribal leadership, and certainly not someone outside the Hashid

The sons of key shaykhs from an older generation, such as Jibrān Mujahid Abu Shawarib, Saba b. Sinan Abu Luhum, and Muhammad b. Naji al-Shayif, have found it difficult to follow in their father’s footsteps because of changed circumstances from the early years of the independent states. The tribes remain vitally important in Yemen, but tribalism no longer means the same thing. As one observer put it as early as the turn of the twenty-first century:

Shaykh ‘Abdullah used to be referred to as *shaykh mashayikh al-yaman* (paramount shaykh of Yemen). That is not a phrase that is heard any more. A decade ago, within that form of common knowledge, Hashidis used to boast that their tribes, unlike others, were united ‘like an army unit.’ That is not a boast I have heard from a Hashid tribesman for a long time: indeed many of them seem demoralized. Although it is hard to imagine tribes ever acting against the Shaykh—he is held in great respect, and rightly—it is just as hard to imagine tribes (Hashid included) acting with him the way they used to even twenty years ago. The Shaykh’s undoubted influence has little to do with traditional *‘asabiyyah* (solidarity based on tribal affiliation).²⁶

Could there still be any long-term succession from the Salih clique? ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Salih was pushing his son Ahmad to succeed him, and indeed that still remains possible if not likely, but the eventual successor could well be someone else close to Salih. The name of ‘Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar was advanced for some years, and his defection from the Salih clique was probably opportunistic. ‘Ali Muhsin undoubtedly was seen as too confrontational, too Islamist, and too tainted by his imbroglios in the war against the Huthis. Even his defection from Salih’s ranks and self-assumed role as protector of the protesters did not advance his standing amongst most Yemenis. His star finally seemed to wane with the Huthis’ occupation of his Sanaa house during their 2014 advance into the capital.

An essential point that remains possible is that succession will derive from the narrow base fashioned over the past thirty years. That base had a very strong tribal component, with “tribal” in this context meaning the superior position of just two tribes, Salih’s own tribe, Sanhan, and the allied tribe, the Hamdan San’a, not even the rest of the Hashid confederation, and certainly not the Bakil. It seems difficult for these two confederations to maintain their impor-

tance in the future, even if they were to support a successor from the Salih clique. In addition, while the armed forces and security apparatus provide a vital bulwark for the regime, they are really only “tribal” in a narrow sense. While most of the soldiers and many of the officers belong to tribes, their identification with and loyalty to the government of the Republic of Yemen and socialization into a wider Yemeni context make their tribal affiliation almost incidental in a political context. It is the military and security apparatus that may well have the most influence on Yemen’s next president, and these institutions will not necessarily act according to tribal norms and solidarity.

The unification of North and South Yemen also produced a renaissance of tribalism in the south and a renewed role for southern shaykhs. Lisa Wedeen notes:

In the aftermath of unification, many southerners began to speak of ‘retribalization’; juxtaposing the PDRY’s (People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen) stated commitments to a modern ‘state of law and order’ with the purportedly primitive or traditional ways of the disorderly North. There is evidence to suggest that areas of the South have experienced the revitalization of structures that Yemenis call tribal, in parts of Yafi’, Abyan, Shabwa, and the Hadramawt. Appointments to high public office since the civil war of 1994 register the emergence of a new elite composed mainly of leaders who carry the title of tribal shaykhs. These men enjoy discretionary powers that are largely above the law.²⁷

It is wide of the mark to assert that there is a collective tribal political consciousness. Instead, the tribes and tribespeople constitute constituencies within broader political aggregations. In this respect, the role of tribes in Yemeni politics is perhaps analogous to that of “working-class white men” or “evangelical Christians” in American politics. Certainly tribal interests are represented in the General People’s Congress, but much in the same way as tribal interests are represented in the security forces. Tribespeople pursue political or military careers just as other Yemenis do. As pointed out above, prominent shaykhs and sons of shaykhs occupy a number of General People’s Congress seats in parliament. One estimate is that the proportion of shaykhs in the *Majlis al-Shura* elected in 2003 was about one-third of the total, with the majority being from the General People’s Congress.²⁸ But, after all, tribespeople constitute a significant number, if not a majority by some definitions, of Yemen’s population, and so it is no surprise that a member of a particular tribe should be elected to parliament in his tribal district. Furthermore, it is not surprising that ambitious individuals, whether tribal or not, should have allied themselves with the General People’s Congress, the most powerful party in Yemen and the party of President Salih.

The tribal aspect of the al-Islah party has been strongly stressed. But to say that the party is the organ of tribalism is as inaccurate as contending that it is the Islamist party. In many respects, its genesis and continuation owe much to the partnership of two men, 'Abdullah b. Husayn al-Ahmar and 'Abd al-Majid al-Zindani. 'Abdullah played a role in the formation of the Islamic Front in 1979, which emerged as an armed force supporting the government in its efforts to extinguish the National Democratic Front in the southern part of North Yemen. Not long after that, 'Abd al-Majid began flexing his muscles. While serving briefly as the Minister of Education he worked to create numerous religious institutes, which were allegedly financed by the Ministry of Education and Saudi money. While the two men, and their respective followers, had some interests in common (for example, their opposition to 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih), their cooperation in the formation of al-Islah seemed to be principally a marriage of convenience. The merged network and resources were stronger and more able to contend with Salih's party, the General People's Congress.

Paradoxically, however, the relegation of al-Islah to ineffectual opposition in electoral terms has been perhaps the reason behind its longevity: if al-Islah had been swept into power, divisions between the tribal and Islamist camps may have quickly deepened and doomed the alliance. While both wings tend to be conservative in social and political terms, the tribes would be less accepting of a strict Islamist state than they are of a weak and corrupt secular state. Furthermore, the generic, Sunni, Salafi, "Wahhabi" emphasis of the Islamist wing directly threatens the Zaydi tribes of the north. This seems to be a contributing factor to the Huthi rebellion and the government's response.

It is perhaps paradoxical to speak on the one hand of President Salih's reliance on fellow and allied tribesmen in the military for the maintenance of his position, while on the other hand refuting the notion that the security forces are tribal in nature. To repeat what was noted above, the foundations of Salih's authority depended on the loyalty of a small clique, not a large tribal alliance. The fact that tribesmen are represented liberally throughout all ranks of the security forces is not necessarily because Salih and his associates have inserted them there, but rather because the army has long served as a positive avenue of employment and advancement. One source puts the proportion of tribesmen in the military at 70–80 percent.²⁹

Only the two tribes in alliance with Salih can be said to have benefited from close political relationships. Even most Hashid tribes have not been favored, although the Kharif and Bani Suraym are said to have done fairly well. It may

even be said that the domination of the Sanhan and Hamdan San'a' tribes in the army has provoked resentment and even coup attempts by other tribes, including Hashid tribes. Rather than being tribal supporters of the President, tribesmen in the armed forces are more likely to be Islamists and therefore closer to al-Zindani and perhaps other even more extremist figures.³⁰ It almost goes without saying that southern tribes do not play a significant role in the military or security services. They are more likely to pose a threat to the regime than be supporters of it, especially since southerners in the army are said to have been used as "cannon fodder" in the fighting against the Huthis outside Sa'dah.

The foregoing should demonstrate that the role of tribes in Yemeni politics has been impacted by a number of social and economic developments. The activities of the local development associations provide an example of how improvements in tribespeople's standard of living can be achieved outside of, or at least in parallel with, traditional tribal ways. Furthermore, tribal loyalties face increasing competition from emerging political parties and from both pan-Arab and Islamist ideologies.

None of this has passed unnoticed by the average tribe member or by his or her shaykhs. Numerous attempts have been made to rally groups of tribes behind the banner of common or confederated interests. During the 1960s civil war, important conferences at 'Amran and Khamir were held to try to resolve the divisions created by the war. 'Abdullah al-Ahmar sought to form a tribal conference for all Yemen, and there were several subsequent conferences aimed at restoring the Bakil to their rightful prominence.

At least four conferences were held during the years between unification in 1990 and the outbreak of civil war in 1994. Matters discussed at these conferences included the expulsion of Yemeni workers from Saudi Arabia during the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, arising from Yemen's decision to oppose the UN resolution authorizing military action against Iraq. Another conference was convened to discuss the protection and preservation of *waf*. In one conference, there was an attempt to wrap broad tribal concerns within a Bakil framework. As Paul Dresch explained it, the wide-ranging, and not necessarily tribal, nature of concerns expressed at these conferences led to other national conferences, and together these discussions appeared more as manifestations of civil society than narrow attempts to preserve a mythical tribal past.³¹ The formation of the National Solidarity Council in 2007 may be seen in a similar light. Although it was a coalition mostly made up of tribes and shaykhs, the council expressed its commitment to using instruments of civil society to reform Yemeni politics held captive by a bad regime and to advance development in Yemen.

Given the factors outlined above, it is problematic to think of a tribal cadre as either a force that supports the regime or as a unified “loyal opposition.” In the first place, the collective power of the tribes in former North Yemen has ebbed markedly over the past quarter-century, while the tribes in the former South Yemen were neutralized and marginalized during the period 1967–90. Any previously existing tribal power base has become more restricted and more fragmented. Secondly, the tribal bloc that long provided the “natural” backing of and influence within Yemeni governments, namely the Hashid and to a lesser extent the Bakil, has disintegrated.

Tribes versus the Republic of Yemen

To a large extent, the major changes that have taken place to the nature of tribes and tribalism in Yemen since the 1990s were the product of a process whereby the shaykhs became more distant from their tribes and the tribespeople gained greater mobility. This process has produced three effects. The first has been a growing atmosphere of lawlessness in Yemen. Severe damage has been sustained by the system and code of tribalism. Incidents of theft and banditry have mushroomed. For example, at the ceremony investing Shaykh Sadiq b. ‘Abdullah al-Ahmar with the leadership of the Hashid confederation after his father’s death, he beseeched his tribe members to stop committing the revenge killings, highway robberies, and wars which he regarded as the cause of incurable crises, a weakened national economy, and a curb on development.

A second effect has been the tendency of tribespeople to rely on their own means to deal with, or pressure, the government. This can be seen most clearly in the phenomenon of abducting foreigners and the recent upsurge in these incidents. Formerly this practice was strictly off-limits, but it has now become almost routine, particularly among the tribes of al-Jawf and Ma’rib who have boldly snatched foreign hostages off the streets of Sanaa as well as tourists who have strayed into their territory. Many of these abductions, as well as the related incidences of sabotage to the oil pipeline, have been directed at gaining more employment for tribes from whose territory oil is being extracted, as well as pressuring the government to release tribe members who are being held in official custody. Nearly all these abductions have been brief and hostages have been released unharmed, often after the alleged payment of ransoms. Notably, the Murad tribe has carried out the abduction of foreigners, in part to get financing for local development projects, and in part to secure the removal of the corrupt head of a military battalion stationed in the region. The Jahm

tribe has been involved not only in the abduction of foreigners but also the abduction of other tribespeople, notably from the Sanhan tribe during an inter-tribal dispute.

But a third effect has involved the development of alliances with—and/or conversions of tribespeople by—Islamist extremists on either practical or ideological grounds. This phenomenon has been marked with violent outcomes. The Bani Dabyan, for example, were implicated, at least at first, in the abduction of sixteen tourists by the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army in December 1998 and the subsequent deaths of four of the tourists. Another prominent example is the way in which Sinan al-Harithi and his associates, operatives of al-Qa’ida, were enjoying refuge with the tribes of al-Jawf, when they were killed by an American Hellfire missile. The ‘Abidah tribe has a long history of abductions, drug smuggling, and providing sanctuary to extremist groups. Yemeni special forces searching for extremists in ‘Abidah tribal territory in December 2001 clashed with tribesmen, resulting in deaths on both sides.

There are other examples of extremist activities in these tribes’ territories. At about the same time as the December 2001 clash, eighty foreign students and teachers at the Dar al-Hadith religious institute in ‘Abidah territory were expelled from Yemen. Tribal connivance would have been necessary in the extremist operation at Ma’rib in July 2007 when seven Spanish tourists and their accompanying Yemeni drivers and guards were murdered. There must have been tribal knowledge of at least the possibility of a similar operation at Shibam in January 2008, in which a number of Belgians were killed or wounded. It is probably impossible to tell to what degree tribal involvement was for reasons of practical alliance or was the result of the conversion of individual tribe members to extremism.

One seemingly paradoxical effect of the domination of the Republic of Yemen by the Sanhan and Hamdan clans (and by extension the greater Hashid confederation) was the re-emergence of two weaker tribal confederations. A number of attempts had been made to resurrect the cohesion of the Bakil, including attempts by various competing shaykhs. More intriguing has been the reappearance of the nearly moribund al-Madhhaj in the southern part of the former Yemen Arab Republic. An alliance between the al-Madhhaj and the Bakil was actively sought by some, even in conjunction with the *sayyid*-organized Union of Popular Forces or the Yemeni Socialist Party. The south has seen some growth in tribal expression as well, not in opposition to the state but for bargaining power with the state. Certainly, one reason for these developments has been efforts to challenge the dominance of the Hashid. In

addition, the reappearance of al-Madhhaj on the national scene owed something to the 1990 unification and the restoration of traditional ties with tribes south of the previous border.³²

Given the weakness of the state and its inability to improve the standard of living of its people, tribes and tribespeople have become increasingly exasperated with the government and the recent phenomenon of urban-based officer and businessmen shaykhs. Accordingly, they have resorted to pursuing alternative means of earning money. Smuggling narcotics, currencies, and weapons across the border with Saudi Arabia has proven lucrative for the tribes of the north and east. These activities have been supplemented by hijackings and abductions for ransom. In addition, money flows to the tribes through the shaykhs from neighboring countries while well-heeled Islamists in the Gulf fuel the growth of Islamist sentiment in the countryside by funding religious institutes and charities. This helps explain why tribespeople poured into Sanaa in 2011 to join the demonstrations against the government and its leader, which they viewed as corrupt and ineffective.³³

After unification, and especially after the 1994 civil war, Salih governed the south in much the same way he had governed the north: with a policy of divide and rule. Stephen W. Day has observed that “since the Yemeni civil war Saleh’s regime has tried to create an entirely new hierarchy among the southern tribes, appointing relatively insignificant sheikhs to positions of power and influence.”³⁴ Thus, rather than strengthening his hold over the south, his policy simply reinforced divisions within southern society.

Tribal unrest in the south will probably grow for two significant reasons. First, northern domination of the south can be expected to continue, stoking resentment amongst most southerners, the tribes included. Second, economic deprivation will also continue, especially as oil production begins to run down. The amount of water available for cultivation and animal husbandry is expected to decline rapidly, and tribe-against-tribe and tribe-against-government fighting are almost inevitable.

Given the relative strength of the Republic of Yemen government (as was demonstrated by its victory in the 1994 civil war), it seems unlikely that southern tribes will unite against it. Should insurrection break out, tribes may take part or sit aside as they did in 1994. However, since the 1994 secession attempt broke the back of the existing leadership in South Yemen—both the Yemeni Socialist Party and the broader coalition of exiles that were recruited to participate—it is difficult to determine from where the leadership for another attempt would emerge. One possibility would be through Islamist

movements. At present, however, there are deep divisions between the existing, essentially status quo Muslim leadership, as represented by *sayyids* and state imams, and more extremist tendencies. Neither the AQAP nor affiliated groups such as Ansar al-Shari’a or the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army have seemed to garner extensive public support. These organizations have sought to curry tribal support, particularly by supporting the claims of tribes in oil-producing areas to a greater share of the oil revenues and by upholding tribal honor. Still, extremist objectives, such as that of establishing a jihadi extremist territorial entity, generally run counter to tribal goals and reduce tribes to an extraneous and subordinate status.³⁵

Tribal connection with Islamist figures and movements tends to be based on factors other than zealotry, such as common dissatisfaction with government corruption and direction. For example, the prominent Islamist figure in Yemen, ‘Abd al-Majid al-Zindani, is regarded as having little standing and slight appeal among the Yemeni tribes. Further to that, tribe members who joined the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army, which abducted a group of Western tourists in 1998, some of whom were subsequently killed in a shoot-out with the army, seem to have become involved for the same reasons that non-tribe members became involved.

While tribes provide many foot soldiers for Islamist movements, they provide few leaders or ideologues. It is true that many of the Yemenis who went to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet Union in the 1980s, the so-called “Afghan Arabs,” were tribe members. Some of the returnees from Afghanistan joined the ranks of AQAP, and their impact in the group should not be underestimated. Sarah Philips and Rodger Shanahan go so far as to argue that “the key to AQAP’s future in Yemen lies with the tribes. If the tribes can be co-opted then AQAP’s future security is compromised—if they cannot then the West faces a longer-term threat from al-Qa’ida.”³⁶

Of course, appeals to tribal honor and the code of hospitality may cause a tribe to provide assistance to an Islamist tribal member; and some shaykhs, such as Tariq al-Fadli, who reportedly joined the AQAP in June 2014, may use their position or status to rally tribespeople around them. But Tariq’s commitment to the Islamist cause has been questioned. In recent years he drew closer to Salih’s party, the General People’s Congress, allegedly to advance his chances of regaining family property and his own fortune, and then turned and publicly opposed Salih. It may also well be that supporting Islamists is seen as being counter-productive. For instance, if a tribe wants representation in parliament, its chances are much better with a General People’s Congress candidate than one from al-Islah.³⁷

The operations against al-Shabab al-Mu'minin (the Believing Youth) in Sa'dah, better known as Ansar Allah or the Huthis, served to magnify their attention, appeal, and tenacity. The government has charged the group with seeking to overthrow the government and attempting to restore the Zaydi imamate. But it also seems reasonably clear that the group was singled out for attack by the government and specifically by 'Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, allegedly because of Wahhabi-Salafi zeal. There are no reliable estimates of the numbers of committed members of the group, but it is known that thousands of young men were exposed to their beliefs in earlier years through a series of summer camps centered around Zaydi traditions. It is reasonable to assume that many Huthis belonged to local tribes, and as government operations killed local tribespeople, their tribes joined the Huthis in resistance.

The extent to which the Huthi affair, particularly the heavy-handed actions and the incompetence of the government, has engendered sympathy throughout the country cannot be gauged accurately. However, the ability of this group to continue the fight in Sa'dah province against sustained military action, supported by pro-government tribes, indicated that it managed to gather additional support. More puzzling was its ability to engage in heavy fighting against troops at 'Amran, and especially in Bani Hushaysh territory on the outskirts of Sanaa. Whether Bani Hushaysh tribesmen joined Huthi forces is unknown, as is the relevance of Bani Hushaysh being the seat of the *sayyid* al-Wazir family, itself involved in periodic anti-government agitation.

The dramatic emergence of the Huthis on the national scene in 2014 points to momentous ramifications for the broader Yemeni situation. The ability and effectiveness of Huthi indoctrination in rural summer camps leads to the possibility of similar activities elsewhere in Yemen, whether Zaydi or especially Sunni. Disaffection with the government—its corruption, its domination by a small clique, and its inability to carry out necessary development and social services—is widespread and is accentuated by the country's dismal economic situation, endemic poverty, and lack of opportunities for young Yemenis. Negative perceptions of the government persisted through the period of leadership of 'Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. These systemic grievances can easily be played upon by extremist groups in the same way as the Huthis have done.

While the regime may feel that it needs to keep Islamists such as 'Abd al-Majid al-Zindani at least partly placated, it is unlikely to have any influence with extremist groups. These regard the government as being beyond the pale and seek to take advantage of Sanaa's unpopular connection to the US. It would take little effort to attempt significant recruitment among the disaf-

fected youth. It may be surmised that urban youth are more susceptible to this type of recruitment, but as the Huthi expansion and the interconnected relationships between extremists and tribes in al-Jawf, Ma'rib, and Shabwah indicate, rural youth are also susceptible to recruitment. In fact, the ties and tribal codes that constrained aberrant behavior amongst tribespeople have deteriorated in the last decade or two, leaving the door wide open for alienation from tribal ties and recruitment to groups defined by ideology.

Finally, it should be remembered that tribes have connections and repercussions beyond Yemen's borders. The connections of Yemeni tribes to Saudi Arabia are long and complex. Yemenis almost unanimously hold the opinion that the Saudi provinces of Najran, 'Asir, and Jazan were stolen in the 1934 Saudi-Yemeni war. Tribal, sectarian, and cultural linkages still abound. Over the last thirty or forty years, literally millions of Yemeni men have emigrated to Saudi Arabia to work; and, of course, many were expelled because of their government's stance after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Cross-border ties between tribes have strengthened because of cooperation in smuggling. This presents a serious problem for the Yemeni government, because it erodes what little control it has in peripheral areas. It is even more serious for Riyadh because of arms smuggling and infiltration by Islamist extremists. While government-to-government relations have frequently been strained, Saudi relations with Yemeni tribes have often been very close. It has been a Saudi policy since 1962 to keep the Yemeni states weak and to provide largesse to the tribes, a policy which was welcomed by the tribes and their shaykhs. Shaykh 'Abdullah Husayn al-Ahmar was always regarded as the Saudis' man in Sanaa (or at least one of them).³⁸ At the same time, Salafi proselytization has proliferated in tribal areas throughout Yemen, but particularly in the north. Whether facilitated by the Saudi secular administration (as contrasted with its Islamist foreign-policy apparatus) or not, the perception in Yemen is that the Saudis are deliberately spreading Wahhabism across the country.

Tribal relations with Oman have been equally significant. While Omani tribes naturally were in the thick of the fighting during the war of the 1960s and 1970s in Oman's southern Dhufar province, Yemeni tribes were only marginally involved. Some tribes of the Mahrah nation defected from Yemen to Oman, in large part because life on the Omani side was more promising than in the poor, austere People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. There are also ancient ties between the Kathir tribes on both sides of the Omani-Yemeni border.

The impact of the Yemen awakening and unravelling on the role of the tribes

The political situation in Yemen underwent a dramatic transformation after early 2011, yet it remained volatile and chaotic as of early 2015. The country's tribes retain their social importance, particularly in terms of identity if not dependence on the tribe for assistance or protection. Tribes still exert at least some degree of autonomy—and the events of 2011–15 have probably increased their autonomy even more, at least for the time being.

If assessing the impact from the prism of “tribes *in* the state,” one could surmise that the tribes will probably have a more restricted role in Yemen's future; however, the exact outcome depends upon circumstances that are unknowable at the present. There may well be positive developments in the reduction of tribal influence, but it should be noted that the weakness of the state militates against this. Two factors underpin this conclusion. First, tribe members increasingly act as individual political actors—as citizens not as tribespeople. Second, the role of the shaykhs as tribal leaders has undeniably diminished.

The impact on the dynamics of “tribes versus the state” may well remain unchanged. Continued tribal actions against the state can be expected for some time to come, including abductions, attacks on the pipeline, the retention of arms, and the continued existence of territorial enclaves which government forces and officials do not penetrate. The near-collapse of the state in 2014–15 further encourages tribes to rely on their own resources and authority. Furthermore, tribal alliances with Islamist extremists can be expected to continue as long as extremism maintains a presence in the country. As explained above, this has less to do with tribal conversion to extremist views than traditional codes of hospitality and a practical alliance against perceived interference in tribal matters and territory by the government of the Republic of Yemen and its external partners, particularly the United States.

After viewing the tumult of 2011–15, one might surmise that predicting the future of Yemen would require a crystal ball. The political importance of tribes in the post-Salih era depends on the interaction of a myriad of developments in the near future. There are two broad scenarios for Yemen's future. One possibility is that 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih would remain in Yemen, interfering in politics; the situation regarding the Huthis, the south, and extremists would remain volatile and unresolved; and the presidential election promised for 2015 would not produce a democratic government. In such a chaotic atmosphere, it seems reasonable to assume that tribalism will remain an important identifier and component of many tribal members' lives. The perception of a volatile atmosphere may even contribute to a revival of tribal identification

among Yemeni tribespeople. Indeed, the surge of Huthi expansion across much of Yemen in 2014–15 points to a recrudescence of tribal influence. The Huthis may not be strong enough to dictate the terms of a new regime, let alone take the reins themselves (and it is not clear that they wish to). But they and their northern tribal allies are likely to have a strong and influential role in Yemeni national politics for years to come.

Another possibility is that Salih and his relatives and allies will be effectively neutralized. Major power brokers—such as Hamid al-Ahmar, 'Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, 'Abd al-Majid al-Zindani, the General People's Congress and the Joint Meeting Parties, various southerners, and the Huthis—will find themselves deadlocked and, in order to block their rivals, will accept a presidential election that is not predetermined and is followed by the establishment of a relatively neutral government. Such a government would inevitably be weak (as was the Iryani government of the early 1970s). This would create a power vacuum that might set tribalism back from its path of steady assimilation into the larger panoply of society.

It would be logical to assume that the future will reveal some combination of the two scenarios described above. Such an outcome would probably leave the tribes in much the same circumstances as they find themselves today, and likely on the sidelines in any national power struggle. Only a strong central government with the capacity to provide social services and security, as well as an ability to govern, is likely to have an effective impact on the political role of tribalism.

6. YEMEN: TRIBES, THE STATE, AND THE UNRAVELLING

1. Sarah Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective: Patronage and Pluralized Authoritarianism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 90.
2. The most comprehensive treatment of the Huthi rebellion is in Barak A. Salmoni, Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, National Defense Research Institute, 2010, prepared for the Defense Intelligence Agency).
3. On the Southern Movement, see Stephen Day, "The Political Challenge of Yemen's Southern Movement" (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International

- Peace, March 2010); Carnegie Papers, “Yemen on the Brink,” Middle East Program, No. 108.
4. The wide-ranging debate about the nature and definition of tribes lies outside the scope of this chapter. The emphasis here is on political interactions of a tribal nature rather than ethnography. Tribes exist in Yemen because Yemenis understand them to do so, and the concept of *qabaliyyah* or tribalism is recognized and referred to throughout Yemeni society. For a dissenting view of Yemen as a quintessentially tribal country, see the interview with Yemeni analyst ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Iryani on AlJazeera.net, 17 March 2011. Iryani states that, “I define tribal as being those whose primary identification is tribal, i.e. if the shaikh calls them to war, they come to his aid. And that applies to about 20% of the population. The other 80% are either urban or peasants, and they are non-tribal. So the over-exaggeration of the tribal nature of Yemen is misplaced.”
 5. *Sayyids* are the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad who provided the imams of North Yemen and their principal lieutenants. *Qadi* means judge, but in Yemen the social status of *qadi* is semi-hereditary. The *muzayyin* are a sub-class in rural Yemen, relegated to certain “unclean” occupations; while the *akhdam* are a separate lower class who traditionally have swept the streets and been responsible for similar activities.
 6. Paul Dresch, “The Tribes of Hashid wa-Bakil as Historical and Geographical Entities,” in Jones, Alan, ed., *Arabicus Felix: Luminosus Britannicus; Essays in Honour of A. F. L. Beeston on his Eightieth Birthday* (Oxford: Ithaca Press for Oxford University, Board of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, 1991), p. 11. It should be noted also that the role and structure of tribes, as well as their relations with state authority, do not remain the same throughout Yemen; there are significant regional variations. An illustration of this point in the far north of the country is made in Shelagh Weir, *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).
 7. Paul Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 88. Another explanation observes that “tribes’ are not fixed, static groups with essences inhering in them. The term, moreover, denotes a conceptual category, in some ways not unlike religious denomination, subject to changing definition and used in different contexts for a variety of political purposes. This is not to argue that tribes and religious denominations operate in an identical manner, and the differences are also instructive.” Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 173–4.
 8. Sheila Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; Cambridge Middle East Studies, No. 9), p. 64.
 9. *Ibid.*, pp. 63–4.
 10. Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History*, pp. 89, 102.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
13. Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History*, pp. 103–5. Dresch also notes as an example of the difference between the two confederations that “identity cards and army pay-books used to have a space to record the man’s tribe (*qabilah*) and, while Bakilis would usually put Arhab or Nihm or whatever was apt, men from at least the three Hashid tribes mentioned would almost always put simply Hashid.” *Ibid.*, pp. 104–5.
14. Gerd-R. Puin, “The Yemeni Hijrah Concept of Tribal Protection,” in Khalidi, Tarif, ed., *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1984), p. 488.
15. J. E. Peterson, *Defending Arabia* (London: Croom Helm; New York: St Martin’s Press, 1986), pp. 35, 82.
16. A recent and comprehensive treatment of events in the PDRY and after is in Noel Brehony, *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).
17. On the war, see Chuck Schmitz, “Civil War in Yemen: The Price of Unity?” *Current History* 94:588 (January 1995), pp. 33–6; Fred Halliday, “The Third Inter-Yemeni War and its Consequences,” *Asian Affairs* (London) 26:2 (June 1995), pp. 131–40; Jamal S. al-Suwaidi (ed.), *The Yemeni War of 1994: Causes and Consequences* (London: Saqi Books, 1995; Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research); and Joseph Kostiner, *Yemen: The Torturous Quest for Unity, 1990–94* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1996; Chatham House Paper).
18. Phillips, *Yemen’s Democracy Experiment*, p. 91.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
20. A good exposition of the relationships, ties, and offices is given in Dresch, *Modern Yemen*, pp. 189, 201–3. See also April Longley Alley, “The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen,” *Middle East Journal* 64:3 (Summer 2010), pp. 385–409.
21. Paul K. Dresch, “The Tribal Factor in the Yemeni Crisis,” in al-Suwaidi, *The Yemeni War of 1994*, pp. 41–2.
22. “Salih is skilled at balancing a complicated array of tribal, family, and regional interests, and individuals are often pawns in a larger strategy of divide-and-rule politics. From a tribal perspective, the President distributes patronage after considering the relationship between various confederations, tribes within confederations, and individual members within prominent tribal families.” Alley, “Rules of the Game,” p. 397.
23. Phillips, *Yemen’s Democracy Experiment*, p. 90.
24. See a biography of ‘Abdullah on the family’s website, www.alahmar.net
25. Alley, “Rules of the Game,” pp. 401–2.
26. Dresch, “Tribal Factor,” p. 40.

27. Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, p. 175.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 85–6.
29. Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment*, p. 95, citing the head of a local NGO.
30. Dresch, "Tribal Factor," pp. 41, 107n22.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 49–54. Stephen Day mentions the holding of tribal conferences in the south in the late 1990s in order to resolve peacefully disputes between tribes. Stephen W. Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion in Yemen: A Troubled National Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 177.
32. Carapico, *Civil Society*, pp. 203–4; Dresch, "Tribal Factor," pp. 45–56.
33. Northern tribal opposition to Salih was not just from ordinary tribe members, as it was reported in April 2011 that a hundred Hashidi and Bakili shaykhs issued a statement calling for Salih's ousting after meeting with other opposition groups. Associated Press, 16 April 2011.
34. Stephen W. Day, "Power-sharing and Hegemony: A Case Study of the United Republic of Yemen" (PhD dissertation, Georgetown University, 2001), p. 446. See also the same author's "Updating Yemeni National Unity: Could Lingering Regional Divisions Bring Down the Regime?" *Middle East Journal* 62:3 (Summer 2008), pp. 417–36.
35. Sarah Phillips and Rodger Shanahan, "Al-Qa'ida, Tribes and Instability in Yemen" (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, November 2009), pp. 6–7. See also Sarah Phillips, "What Comes Next in Yemen? Al-Qaeda, the Tribes, and State-Building" (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2010; Carnegie Papers, "Yemen on the Brink," Middle East Program, No. 107).
36. Phillips and Shanahan, "Al-Qa'ida, Tribes and Instability in Yemen," p. 9.
37. Elizabeth Mechelle Langston, *The Islamist Movement and Tribal Networks: Islamist Party Mobilization Amongst the Tribes of Jordan and Yemen* (PhD dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2005), pp. 203–4.
38. The Saudis paid 'Abdullah a monthly subsidy of \$1.87 million in the early 1990s. It was severed as a result of the 1994 civil war, but later restored at \$800,000 a month. Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment*, p. 100.

UZI RABI

(Editor)

Tribes and States in a Changing Middle East

HURST & COMPANY, LONDON

First published in the United Kingdom in 2016 by
C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd.,
41 Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3PL
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Printed in India by Imprint Digital Ltd

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A Cataloguing-in-Publication data record for this book is available
from the British Library.

9781849043458 *hardback*

This book is printed using paper from registered sustainable
and managed sources.

www.hurstpublishers.com

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